

Coal - Calif. cities take chance on alternative energy by bucking IPA contracts

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Reversing a decision from earlier this month, several Southern California cities have abandoned plans to renew contracts for coal-fired electricity, instead planning to rely on alternative energy once the state's greenhouse gas law takes effect and their current contracts expire.

The move reverses votes taken at the beginning of the month, when Burbank and Riverside initially moved to extend their contracts with **Utah**-based Intermountain Power Agency to 2044, and Glendale and Pasadena were preparing to do the same. Although the each city's current contracts with the utility are not set to expire until 2027, IPA officials said they needed to know now if the cities wanted to extend the agreements because of the looming implementation of SB 1368. The bill, designed to cap greenhouse gas emissions from some industries in California, requires the state to cut GHGs by 25 percent.

Officials from the various cities had said that they had been paying off capital costs to construct the Utah power plants since the late 1980s and that if they did not renew now they would lose the right to buy power for about 50 percent less once those costs were paid off in 2027 because of the passage of SB 1368.

However, Anaheim, Burbank, Glendale, Pasadena and Riverside told IPA on Monday that they have reversed their decision and would not be renewing their contracts.

The cities acknowledged the decision was risky. "It's a very challenging undertaking. All of these [alternative] technologies are still in their infancy," said Phyllis Currie, general manager of Pasadena Water & Power. "We're still looking at the fact that right now, the Intermountain plant is 65 percent of our energy."

IPA General Manager Reed Searle said he was disappointed because the utility had worked on the renewal contracts for three years and was looking at ways to comply with California's greenhouse gas law, including burning biomass and sequestering carbon dioxide. He said the utility would extend its renewal offer until 2023.

The Center for Energy Efficiency and Renewable Technology's V. John White said IPA officials were "not used to the light of day. They're used to having a cocktail with a city official and renewing a deal" with no public discussion. The reversal occurred due to "a public outcry, and it forced yes or no votes on global warming," he said.

(Janet Wilson, Los Angeles Times, Nov. 22). -- DK